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PHILBY
—by the US agent who worked with him

CHRISTOPHER FELIX (nom-de-plume of a former American diplomat and secret intelligence official who was Philby's opposite number in Washington) assesses the damage Kim Philby's spying did to the West.

KIM PHILBY came to us in 1949 in sign of a reinvigorated Anglo-American partnership.

The operation whose command I shared with Philby, an especially dangerous one, not only failed, but many men lost their lives.

He did not, finally, destroy Anglo-American co-operation in intelligence affairs, but he did poison the atmosphere for a considerable time.

The damage Philby wrought was clearly extensive. His was a classic case of penetration in the interests of a rival service, the professional aim of intelligence services the world over. The Russians have every reason to be grateful to him.

Philby's knowledge of both British and American intelligence personnel and — equally important for the Russians—of the structure and operational methods of the two services, was very great.

At the same time, he did not know everything.

It would not be in the interests of Britain or America, even today, to make public a detailed inventory of the damage wrought to those interests by Philby.

Malcolm Muggeridge once complained about the governmental tendency to refuse comment on losses of this kind. 'Secrets which are known to have leaked,' he wrote in some dudgeon, 'far from being written off, are guarded with particular ferocity.' What Muggeridge didn't realise, and Philby did, is that silence is the only way of downgrading the information passed by a spy such as Philby.

For neither he nor his Russian masters have an accurate and certain knowledge of how much, in proportion to the whole, he knew at the time he was operating. They do not even know for certain when suspicion first attached to Philby, and therefore they do not know, beyond a certain obvious limit, exactly how much of the information he provided them with was valid.

Relations between secret services are probably the most sensitive—and accurate—barometer of the true state of international politics. In the reviving Anglo-American partnership of 1949 co-operation between the British and American services was therefore fast regaining the scope and intimacy which had characterised their wartime relations.

Philby's arrival on the American scene was thus in response to an estimate shared by policy-makers in London and Washington of the need for wider and closer co-operation in the field of secret operations, both intelligence and political.

One of Philby's first acts in Washington was to assume command with me of a new joint Anglo-American operation, the first venture of its kind since the war. Philby received his instructions from London, I received mine from my immediate superiors in Washington, and we then jointly formulated the orders for our agents abroad.

This meant frequent consultations: over a year or more I saw Philby in my office on an average of twice a week; and in time we came to see a great deal of each other, at either his house or mine.

Philby's reputation was such that his appointment was taken in Washington as an earnest of serious British intentions for our mutual cooperation. He was felt to carry weight. Everything conspired to present him in a favourable light. Even the fact that his father had been interned at the beginning of the war, and that Philby had nonetheless rendered such distinguished wartime service, was taken by many in Washington—myself included—as a measure of his loyalty.

Those among us who had known Philby in London during the war, or later in Turkey, commented enthusiastically on his skill and ability.

I remember talking with an American colleague who had known Philby during the war, and who had come to see me just after Philby left my office.

While we were talking something kept working at the back of my mind. (It must be understood that no matter how closely two intelligence services may cooperate, there are always things which are withheld, and there is, in the simple nature of things, a constant jockeying for advantage.)

Suddenly, perhaps half an hour after Philby had left me, I perceived the advantage he had adroitly gained over me. I interrupted my American colleague to exclaim, 'I'm bleeding! I've just realised I've been stabbed!'

He burst into laughter. 'If you've only realised it now,' he said, 'it was Philby who did it!'

It was not widely known in Washington, even among professional intelligence officers, that Philby had set up the Soviet section of the British service in 1944. Those who now denounce the establishment of this operation in 1944 as running counter to the interest of peaceful postwar co-operation with the Russians betray a romantic over-estimate of the true weight of espionage in international life, and a convenient lapse of memory, or ignorance, of Russian activities at the time.

However, word of it did get around, further enhancing Philby's reputation by establishing him as a substantive expert in the field which counted most.

Philby was known to have been involved in a major bureaucratic battle in London during the war and to have come out the victor. He thus arrived among us in the prestigious role—particularly appealing to Americans—of leader of a faction of 'Young Turks' who had imposed their will on an 'Old Guard.'

Future chief

I do not recall anyone saying then that Philby was a probable future chief of the British service—that estimate only became common currency after his flight to Moscow in 1963—but it was generally accepted that he would in time become, if he was not already, a major factor in the British service.

The potency of this aspect of

Continued

Philby's reputation emerged in the comment of one of my senior colleagues some time after Philby's dismissal from the British service. I had left Washington before this occurred, and was not familiar with the details. As I frequently visited London at the time, and had heard that Philby was in very difficult straits, I determined to renew my personal friendship with him. Before doing so I advised my colleague, who remarked, 'Good idea. I'm convinced that Philby will still show up one day in a very important role in the British service.'

As it happened, Philby came to cocktails a couple of times in a flat loaned to us by friends in Lowndes Square. He was seedy, nearly haggard, and appeared to me embarrassed by my gesture. He did not pursue the connection, and eventually dropped from my sight altogether.

That I went this far in a gesture of friendship is, of course, a measure of Philby's charm. His slumped carriage contributed rather than detracted from it: his efforts to overcome an attack (it appeared at irregular intervals and in varying degrees of intensity were so monumental and so dogged that sympathy and admiration were aroused in equal measure.

He had an engaging smile, of the kind that suggests complicity in a private joke. He was witty, but never unkind. His then wife, Aileen, reinforced his charm: of a frightening thinness, I never saw her *triste;* she was always full of laughter, not a little of it attractively self-deprecatory, and she was good and easy company. The drinking, gargantuan as it was at the Philbys" was but one aspect of a disordered life which seemed less anomalous then, only four years after the war, than it might appear 20 years later.

Burgess's visit

The one instance in which Philby's charm was of no avail was in the matter of his friend Guy Burgess. When Burgess came to stay with Philby in his house on Nebraska Avenue, it was evident that Philby wanted one to appreciate Burgess as much as he did.' This was quite impossible: Burgess too patently disliked every American he encountered.

Philby's office in the British Embassy in Washington was considered the most secure, and it was, therefore, Philby who transmitted the communications between the American and British Governments in September 1949, when the Russians exploded their first atomic bomb. Exchanges of this kind are normally both technical and political.

It is not falsely denigrating Philby's importance to note that he did not know everything. He probably helped the Russians significantly in compromising British codes and ciphers, for example, but he was in no position to do the same with respect to American communications. And he was by no means an official of the rank and influence of Sir William Stephenson, the Canadian who was in charge of Britain's wartime security activities in the United States. Philby was a high-level bureaucrat, but he was not a policy-maker.

Frozen loyalty

In August 1963, after Philby's presence in Moscow had become known, I lunched in London with an American who had also worked closely with Philby. My friend was enraged. 'If I saw him I would cheerfully kill him,' he said.

I do not altogether dismiss this as an appropriate reaction, although I do not share it personally. At the same time, however, I cannot join Graham Greene in publicly 'lifting my glass in a toast to Kim, wherever he is.'

Treason, at least successful treason, as in Philby's case, is eventually judged by history. Meanwhile, I am content to visualise Kim in Moscow, frozen in an intellectual loyalty which he adopted, no doubt for emotional reasons, more than 30 years ago, and from which, in spite of whatever he may have learned since, he cannot escape.

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